

Classroom Expectations

Expectations are a common theme throughout every classroom in every country. Expectations are the rules and guidelines within a classroom. The following chapter will delve into aspects of expectations relating to responsibility, respect, and safety, which are key topics in Maine classrooms. It is a common practice to display signage about the “3 B’s”; be respectful, be responsible, and be safe.

Responsibility:

Responsibility is defined by Google as “the state or fact of having a duty to deal with something or of having control over someone”. Aside from the text book definition, responsibility is something every human has intrinsically; inside of themselves. A person can be responsible or not, sometimes they make that decision consciously but other times it is involuntary. A classroom setting has an unequivocal amount of responsibility, both in the teacher and the student. The teacher is responsible for the student’s understanding (to some degree), for classroom safety, for creating engaging and through lesson plans, and finally to ensure that the student is succeeding – and if not, to help them succeed. Students are responsible for their own learning, for their work outside of class, and to help constitute a safe environment.

Teacher Responsibility

Teachers are expected to be professional throughout all of their work. This means that they have to look and act professional, as well as be able to speak and behave professionally. That is something that all teachers are responsible for – their own behavior and manner. Teachers have to hold themselves to a higher level in their responsibility for themselves, simply because it is in their job description.

Teachers are responsible for being prepared for class, in planning for the class and executing the class. A teacher has to come up with an engaging, interactive, intelligent, and clear lesson plan. They have to keep twenty to thirty students focused on the lesson at hand, and keep them from being distracted from everything else. Teachers will lose students if their lesson is too serious, but will not be taken seriously if the lesson is too interactive. Teachers have a fine line to walk in terms of lesson planning, and they are responsible to walk that line very well.

Aside from having responsibility to come to class to teach students, teachers have a responsibility to the physical state of the students. “Teachers also have responsibilities under the Children Act 1989, which places duties upon those who care for children.”(p8, berry) Teachers have a responsibility to make sure students are mentally, physically, and emotionally safe. They are responsible to monitor bullying and aggression, not only in their classroom – but in the entire building. They are responsible to make sure all student needs are met. In relation to physical

safety, teachers are even going so far as to be certified gun carriers. After the events at Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012, some schools are considering allowing their teachers to conceal and carry firearms in schools. The New York Times wrote an article in April 2013 titled, 'A Missouri School Trains Its Teachers to Carry Guns, and Most Parents Approve'. This article discusses how one school went to the length to arm their teachers. Some schools assume teacher's responsibilities to go as far as to put their lives on the line for their students. This is in debate, however.

Jon Berry sums up teacher responsibility the clearest in his book, *Teachers' Legal Rights and Responsibilities: A Guide for Trainee Teachers and Those New to the Profession*, "Defining the extent of what teachers are expected to do, the range of their responsibilities, has been, to say the least, a tricky business for many years." (p4)

Student Responsibility

Student responsibility is much less grave an issue as a teacher's responsibility. Students have personal responsibility, as well as classroom responsibility. Students are held to certain expectations in the classroom environment, and have to be responsible to live up to those expectations.

Students have personal responsibility for their learning and their work. This means, that they have to hold themselves to completing out of class work, and understanding the content in a classroom. This is nothing a teacher can force upon a student. If the student does not want to do their homework or pay attention in class, it is ultimately up to them to decide. It also falls under personal responsibility to be on time for class and try to not be as absent as possible. Student attendance falls on the student, and their commitment to go to school. This is something the parents can try to force, but again, ultimately falls on the student.

Shared Responsibility

Some aspects of classroom responsibility rely on both the students and the teacher. A school can only be successful when a framework for shared responsibility for learning is established. This involves having focus, which "creates a shared clarity of thought, direction, and purpose." Reflection, which "helps people learn from what they've done in the past and identify better ways of accomplishing their goals." (p11). Finally it requires collaboration, which "brings people together to share ideas and knowledge". This model is found in *Building Shared Responsibility for Student Learning*, a book by Anne Conzemius and Jan O'Neill. If a school implements these three aspects of learning and responsibility in tandem, it will result in dedicated, responsible, reliable, and engaged students. This needs to be shared, however, between students and teachers! Students need to rely on teachers to facilitate the framework, and students need to maintain and engage it.

Distractions, disruptions, and chatter all depend on both the work of the teacher and the student. It is the student's responsibility to remain focused and learning during a lesson. They should devote time spent causing distraction, engaging in their learning. Teachers are expected and responsible to stop any

distractions, disruptions, or chatter. But it is on the student's part to not have distractions, disruptions, and chatter in the first place. It is a tandem responsibility.

Finally, classroom organization and classroom management are a shared responsibility between the students and teacher. It is a combined job to create a list of classroom management techniques and shared goals for the class to follow. This requires input on part of the students, and monitoring from the teacher. If a student is invested in their classroom atmosphere, they are more invested in their responsibility in the classroom as a whole. It should fall on the students to monitor class expectations as well. This means, if they see someone disrespecting the rules of the classroom, they should say something. It falls on the student in the moment to maintain classroom management and classroom rules. If a student does not maintain this responsibility, then they let down the system as a whole. A classroom is a shared habitat between the teacher and the student, so it is something that needs input and dedication from both the teacher and student to survive. A successful classroom can only function if the students and teachers are responsible to uphold their individual jobs and overall expectations.



Search for a triangle of shared responsibility from quality leadership by design

Respect

Respect is defined by the Merriam Webster Dictionary as “a feeling of admiring someone or something that is good, valuable, important, etc.” Having and giving respect is very important, especially in the classroom setting. Respect is not a one way street; in order to get it, you have to give it. “Show that even though you are in charge of the class, you respect the student and expect respect in return.” Classroom respect can be divided into two parts: giving and getting respect to students and respecting colleagues.

Giving and Getting Respect from Students

Respect is not an automatic reaction when meeting new people. First year teachers, especially, need to establish a good rapport with the student body. Even on the first day, students should be able to tell if their teacher respects them. Here are some ways for teachers to show students that they have respect for them:

- Take command- let the students know who is in charge and be confident about taking that charge, but still professional.
- Listen- Being able to stop and listen to the students. This can mean the world to that one student who has had a particularly bad day.
- Get control of yourself- keep your emotions in check so you do not overreact. Avoid getting overexcited and ahead of yourself. That way it is easier to stick to what you originally said you would do.
- Let the students be heard- let each student share their opinions without passing judgment.
- Look the part- look professional and maintain awareness of time and control of the classroom.

By taking command of the classroom, the teacher is showing his or her students that they mean business and want to get to work. It is normal for students to want to play around in class and that is okay once in a while, but work needs to be done in a timely manner. Be confident as well. "Like dogs, children can sense fear a mile away and will prey upon it if given the opportunity. If you're feeling unsure of yourself, practice confident body language until you begin to feel it on the inside." [9] If the teacher acts more like a student than a professional educator, fewer students are likely to respect them. Students may find that teacher more likeable, but not as respectable.

Students sometimes just need an unbiased person to talk to and might not like going to the guidance office to talk to a counselor. Let them talk. Some students may not get enough attention, or feel comfortable to share their feelings, at home so they have to get it somewhere. If a student has had a particularly rough day and is feeling overwhelmed, they may go to a teacher to ask for help or an extension on an assignment. Let them tell their story before responding. If a student's family member, friend, or pet has fallen ill or died, they might come to you to talk about it and get it off their chest. As long as they are not threatening to hurt himself or herself or someone else, let them talk.

Keep your emotions and body in check. If the teacher walks around hunched over and shuffles their feet around when they walk, then they are not showing confidence. Constantly be aware of posture, attitude, and expression. When frustration sets in, students do not want to see that because then they will get upset and frustrated as well. That will result in a classroom full of upset people who no longer are interested in the lesson. If you said you would do something, do it. If a teacher goes back on his or her word, then they will be labeled a liar and will have a lot of hatred coming from their students.

Students have opinions and religious beliefs. There is a good chance that there will be major differences in opinions and beliefs in a single classroom, but that does not mean students need to bottle all of it up. Sometimes a debate is sparked in the middle of class because of a student's opinions on a topic and that can change the rest of the lesson plan, but discussions can be a good way for students to channel their frustrations into something productive.

Act and look like a teacher. Students will have more respect for a teacher that looks the part (neat, tidy, well-kempt) rather than another student (just rolled out of bed, messy, jeans and tee shirt). Dressing the part also helps a teacher feel the part. Teachers standing in front of the classroom in their dress clothes, exuding confidence, also need to be aware of the time so as to keep the class going in a timely manner. They also need to keep the students and activities within the classroom under control.

Respect your Colleagues



Colleagues are a great source of information and advice on students, how the school operates, etc. If a teacher does not treat their colleague with respect, the colleague will not want to help when the other teacher asks for it.

Value a colleague's opinion and advice, especially if they have been teaching longer than you. Try not to offend them by ignoring their advice, not treating them as an equal, etc.

Safety

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines the word safety as “freedom from harm or danger”. In a classroom, harm and danger can come in many different forms both tangible and abstract. It is important as educators to keep this in mind as classroom expectations are outlined for individual classes. Classroom safety can be broken into two categories: physical safety and mental safety. These two facets of safety will be further explained as we look into what each of them looks like and how we can promote their application.

Physical Safety



If a group of students is asked what a list of classroom expectations should look like, chances are they will, at some point say, “Keep your hands and feet to yourself”. In a secondary education classroom this should be an obvious point students have been learning since kindergarten. As are points such as: knowing how to exit the building during a fire drill or what to do in a

lock down situation. But what other physical aspects of a classroom should be monitored?

University of Wisconsin Whitewater points out that “Safety is not a goal in itself, but a prerequisite for the kind of classroom climate that can result in learning.” This sort of safety is in reference to a student’s actual placement in the classroom space and things can be arranged around that. There are many potential ways to establish safety in a classroom environment. The University of Wisconsin Whitewater recommends setting up the classroom in a way, which can encourage safety. One of the biggest points they make is whatever the classroom set up, make it conducive to a positive discussion based environment. Enhancing the community bonds by implementing desks outline a circle or horseshoe is highly recommended. This way, students look at their peers as part of the whole community rather than separate island entities.

There are other physical changes that can be made in a classroom which promote healthy learning. Making sure a classroom has adequate and comfortable lighting is critical to the learning experience. The article “Creating a Safe Learning Environment” also encouraged maintaining a comfortable temperature within the room to keep students alert, focused, and undistracted by a fluctuating temperature. Other suggestions to promote physical health and safety in the classroom advise the encouragement of movement every once in a while. This is to optimize blood flow in the body and keep students active and alert.

Mental Safety

One idea that may not be considered along with physical safety, is mental safety. This encompasses the fostering of students’ self confidence, pride in work, and ability to be kind to one another. It is encouraging students to recognize that even though you may not hit someone you can still hurt them in other ways as well.

The first person who needs to be aware of students’ emotional needs is the teacher. It is up to them to read the room, to be able to see what students need to enrich their emotional lives. Dr. Bruce Perry writes about this important teacher student relationship. He encourages teachers to “Use your most powerful teaching tool, your personality. Your smile, your voice, and your touch make a child feel safe.”¹ He also encourages teachers to use predictability and consistency in creating a stable, and therefore more secure, classroom environment.

The next people who need to be aware of mental safety in the classroom are the students. It is important for students to see and understand that feelings and emotions they have are normal. They need to be shown how to take what they feel and turn it into something constructive. Linda Darling-Hammond created a sort of lesson outline for teachers to understand what teachers can do in the classroom to incorporate student emotions into the lesson. There are five key points in working with emotion in the classroom: self-awareness, managing emotions, self- motivation, empathy and handling social relationships.

In order to incorporate these ideas into the classroom Darling-Hammond recommends incorporating the ideas into different lessons. Self-awareness can be done by discussing different emotions with students, and allowing them time to reflect on their emotions and the reasons behind them in journals. Managing emotions can be tied into discussions about conflict-resolution and seeing solutions in problems. Self-motivation can be developed through teacher demonstrated optimism and encouragement to fix mistakes. Social relationship management comes through in all different aspects of interpersonal related lesson ideas.

Besides being aware of their own personal mental health. Students need to learn that in some cases they may be responsible for the mental health of another student. As a teacher it is critical to show students that their words, no matter what the context, may be

Commonly used words to describe Bullying



hurtful to fellow students. One of the most talked about topics today is this prevention of bullying.

It is encouraged to teach students not to bully other students. It is also important to teach students strategies to handle bullying from all perspectives. Sandra Feldman says that in addition to self confidence, "Kids need

help developing strategies to deal with the intimidating behavior of their peers, like walking away or telling the bully to knock it off." As well as learning how to ward off bullies as the victim, students should also be informed about the role they play as an observer. Even if a student is simply observing the incident, they are technically still a part of it. The bully may interpret their presence as approval, or at the least attention.

Students also need to be informed about what a teacher can do to help them and other students stay mentally safe. It is recommended that teachers, principals, and parents should all be made more aware of the existence of bullying tendencies in an environment. It is also important for these same adults to be prepared to assist students in communicating their emotions and feelings to help them with their understanding of their emotions.

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